

Week Ending Friday, September 3, 1999

The President's Radio Address

August 28, 1999

Good morning. This week students all over the country are getting ready for the first day of school. Like every year, parents will send their children off to school with new backpacks and fresh hopes that they'll get the world-class education they need and deserve. Today I want to talk about our continuing efforts to strengthen and renew our Nation's public schools, by encouraging more choice, competition, and creativity.

For more than 6½ years now, Secretary Riley and I and our whole administration have worked hard to raise standards, raise expectations, and raise accountability in every public school in America. I have advanced a comprehensive plan to strengthen and renew our Nation's schools and education agenda for the 21st century—from reducing class size to improving teacher quality, from modernizing and rebuilding thousands of schools to finishing the job of connecting every library and classroom to the Internet, from putting an end to social promotion to expanding after-school and summer school programs.

We've also worked hard to promote the creativity, competition, and accountability that can turn around failing schools and make our good schools even better. That's the big reason I've encouraged States to pass charter school laws and urge communities all across our country to give charter schools a chance.

Charter schools are innovative public schools started by educators, parents, and communities, open to students of every background or ability. But they're freer of redtape and top-down management than most of our schools are, and in return for greater flexibility, charter schools must set and meet the highest standards, and stay open only as long as they do.

Also, charter schools don't divert taxpayer dollars from our public school system; in-

stead, they use those dollars to promote excellence and competition within the system. And in so doing, they spur all our public schools to improve.

I am proud of the progress we've made so far. When I was first elected President, there was only one charter school in the entire country. This year there will be more than 1,700 of them. We're well on our way to meeting my goal of establishing 3,000 charter schools nationwide in the first year of the new century.

For an increasing number of families, charter schools are the right choice. In fact, there are now waiting lists at 7 out of 10 existing charter schools, as more parents realize that more innovation and creativity can produce good results for their children.

Let me give you just one example. When Bowling Green Elementary School in Sacramento ranked third from the bottom in its district, parents and teachers decided they had to do something to take control and turn the situation around. So they set up a charter school there. Since becoming a charter school, Bowling Green has seen student performance soar—with greater gains in test scores than any other school in the school district.

The charter school movement is a real grassroots revolution in education. We must do everything we can to support it. Today I am pleased to announce nearly \$100 million in funding for charter schools all around America. These funds will help teachers and parents open new charter schools in 32 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

They will help existing charter schools hire more well-trained teachers, buy more books, computers, and educational software, and ensure that classrooms are safe and accessible for all students. Finally, these funds will help charter schools develop accountability systems to measure whether they are meeting or exceeding State standards.

Charter schools are living proof of what parents and teachers can do to reinvigorate public education. Investing in them means investing in accountability and excellence and a much better future for our children.

But just as our children are returning to class, the Republican leadership's risky tax cut plan would undermine these investments by forcing deep and irresponsible cuts in education and other important national priorities. So, as Congress comes back to Washington, let's remind them what the creators and the students of America's charter schools already know: We're all accountable for our children's future, and an investment in it is our best investment in all our future.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Edgartown School in Martha's Vineyard, MA.

Remarks at a Victory 2000 Dinner in East Hampton, New York

August 28, 1999

Thank you. Let me thank all of you for the wonderful welcome you have given to Hillary and to me, and to the cause that we come here to advance tonight for the Democratic Committee and for the Senate Campaign Committee and for our prospective candidate from New York over here. [*Laughter*]

This is a very special night for me for many reasons. Most of you—and perhaps some of you know this, but Liz Robbins has been a friend of Hillary's and mine for about 20 years now. And she and Doug have brought a lot of light into our lives, and I want to thank them for opening their home to us. You know, this is kind of a—if you've ever hosted one of these deals—[*laughter*—you know, the nice wears off after about 10 minutes, and you start thinking about it. And you think, "If it's a bust, I'll be humiliated; and if it's successful, they'll destroy all the hedges." [*Laughter*] So I think we ought to give them a hand and thank them for doing this. [*Applause*]

I also want to thank all the people who—starting with the folks—the singer—and the Turtle Crossing restaurant for donating the food, and all the people who served us here

tonight. Thank you all very much for what you've done. I appreciate it very much.

We have mentioned our New York State chair, Judith Hope, and Governor Romer and Joe Andrew and Beth Dozoretz and Andy Tobias, all the people from the DNC, I thank them.

I'm very grateful to the Members of Congress who are here—to Senator Torricelli and Senator Lautenberg and Congressman Forbes; and Congresswoman McCarthy, who had to leave. I'd also like to acknowledge a presence that you won't be hard to find in the former Congressman, Tom McMillan from Maryland, and the former Chairman of the President's Council on Physical Fitness. Thank you, Tom, for being here. And Mark Green, the New York City comptroller, thank you very much, Mark, for being here—the consumer advocate.

And I love Phoebe Snow. And she has been so good to me, and so good to the Democratic Party, and she has sung a lot of different songs. Those of you who know a lot about American gospel and music may know that "His Eye is on the Sparrow" was perhaps Martin Luther King's favorite hymn.

But if you think about it, it's a pretty good reason for being a Democrat, because our eye is on the sparrow, and all the other people around, and we figure—most of us who can afford to be under this tent tonight—that if they do well, God has given us enough gifts that we're going to do just fine. If ordinary folks do well and the conditions of the country are good, then those of us who have the resources and have been gifted with certain talents and certain training, we're going to do very well. And so the hymn was a good setting for our meeting here tonight.

I will be very brief. I want to make a case for our party in the coming election. I think that the First Lady made a pretty good case for herself—[*laughter*—but I'd like to say a word or two about that. And I want to talk about you and what you're going to do between now and November of 2000. And I'll do it quickly.

When I was elected in 1992, the people of New York and the people of the United States took a chance on me and Al Gore, because they were worried about the direction of the economy and the direction of the